

Why Celebrate Christmas - Luke 2:1-20 - Sunday, December 20th, 2015

- I would like to begin this years Christmas sermon by saying how thankful I am for you as a church, both here and online as well.
- The Lord has blessed this church exceedingly, abundantly above and beyond anything I could have ever imagined or asked.
- I deem it a privilege to be your pastor. From my ohana to yours, have a blessed Christmas, and God's best in the New Year.

Luke 2:1-20 KJV And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (2) (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) (3) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. (4) And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) (5) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. (6) And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. (7) And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. (8) And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. (9) And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. (10) And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (12) And this *shall be* a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. (13) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, (14) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (15) And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. (16) And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. (17) And when they had seen *it*, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. (18) And all they that heard *it* wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. (19) But Mary kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart. (20) And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

- By way of introduction I must confess this Christmas has been one of the most difficult and not for the reasons one might think.
- I'd be disingenuous at best and dishonest at worst if I didn't admit that this years attacks on Christmas have really gotten to me.
- Perhaps it's because of the venomous attacks from professing Christians who attack those Christians who celebrate Christmas.

- As such, I've found myself inquiring of the Lord concerning my emotions of both anger and sadness and everything in between.
- Thankfully, as God is always faithful to do, He responded to my petition by ministering to me powerfully, deeply and yet simply.
- I suppose I shouldn't be surprised given the birth of the Savior would bring the child like simplicity of good tidings and great joy.

- I would submit that Jesus was born as a child into the world, so we could come as a child to Him as the Savior of the world.

Mark 10:15 NIV I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Isaiah 9:6 KJV For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

- I hope kindly indulge me as I share with you that which God ministered to me as it relates to why I love to celebrate Christmas.
- Actually, truth be made known, it's for this reason that I chose to title this years Christmas sermon, "Why Celebrate Christmas."
- What follows, are two reasons as to why our celebration of Christmas should bring joy to the world, especially for Christians.

1) The world today, in this, the last days, is in complete confusion, chaos and fear

- Now more than ever we need to hear, "Fear not: for, I bring you good tidings of great joy, peace on earth good will toward men."
- If there was ever a time for the message of Christmas, it is now, as the world seemingly waxes more and more evil by the day.
- I suppose you could say in the last two thousand years since the Savior's birth in Bethlehem the world is no complete bedlam.

This may come as somewhat of a surprise, but the word bedlam actually came from the word Bethlehem. Let me explain with this true story that dates back to the year 1247 when a hospital was founded in England called St. Mary of Bethlehem. Its infamous history has inspired several books, films and a TV series, most notably Bedlam, a 1946 film with Boris Karloff. It has moved three times from its original location, and is Europe's first and oldest institution to specialize in mental illnesses. Although the hospital became a modern psychiatric facility, historically it was representative of the worst excesses of asylums in the era of lunacy reform. Two centuries later it was converted into a hospital for the insane. In those days when the feeble-minded were chained and abused, that institution became known throughout the country for its noise and confusion. The original name of Bethlehem was gradually shortened to Bedlam, a word that has come into the English language as meaning any place of wild uproar and confusion and become synonymous with pandemonium, commotion, mayhem, disorder, chaos, anarchy, and lawlessness. What an apt description of the world's condition today, complete bedlam.

- One need look no further than to this Fox News Op Ed to see the lunacy and insanity surrounding the Christmas bedlam today.

Wednesday, December 16th, 2015, Fox News - "Oh good grief! School district censors Charlie Brown Christmas." - There are some days when this anti-Christmas nonsense is enough to make you deck somebody's halls. The latest yuletide lunacy comes from Johnson County, Kentucky where the school district has censored an elementary school presentation of "A Charlie Brown Christmas." The district also ordered other schools to remove all religious references from their upcoming Christmas productions. At one school, "Silent Night" was replaced with a Christmas version of the "Whip/Nae Nae" song. Yes, good readers — apparently that is a real thing. "How do you go from 'Silent Night' to the 'Whip/Nae Nae,'" one distraught grandmother asked me. "We're not at all happy about it." Teachers at W.R. Castle Elementary School were directed to remove the moving scene where Linus shares the true meaning of Christmas by reading from the Gospel of Luke. Superintendent Tom Salyer confirmed to me that the entire passage was excised from the program after the district received a single complaint. "We're not reading that, sir," Salyer told me. "It disappoints men that we have to do this." The superintendent, who said he is a church-going man, said he was simply following the advice of school district attorneys. He posted this message on the district's website: "In accordance with federal laws, our programs will follow appropriate regulations. The U.S. Supreme Court and the 6th Circuit are very clear that public school staff may not endorse any religion when acting in their official capacities and during school activities. However, our district is fully committed to promote the spirit of giving and concern for our fellow citizens that help define the Christmas holiday. With core values such as service, integrity, leadership, and commitment, our staff and students will continue to proudly represent our district as recently demonstrated by our many student successes." Allow me to cut through the bureaucratic malarkey and interpret the superintendent's message through the language of Charlie Brown: "WAH, WAH WAH, WAH, WAH WAH, WAH." Baptist preacher Tom Winston has been manning a picket line outside the local high school— hoping the Grinches inside will reverse their ban on the Baby Jesus. "If you take Christ out of the Christmas play, it's only a play," the pastor told me. "That's the bottom line." The district's religious cleansing of Christmas caught the attention of Alliance Defending Freedom, a law firm that tackles religious liberty issues. They wrote a letter on behalf of a parent whose daughter is a cast member in the show — urging the district to reconsider the censorship. "There is no violation of the so-called 'separation of church and state' by allowing children to learn about theater and the origins of Christmas through participating in a stage version of this beloved program that contains the same religious elements as the television version," ADF Senior Legal Counsel Jeremy Tedesco wrote. "Moreover, students may learn about the religious origins of Christmas as part of school activities without offending the Constitution," he added. Pastor Winston said it's time for people of faith to take a public stand and demand the district do the right thing. "We should not be backing down..." <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2015/12/16/oh-good-grief-school-district-censors-charlie-brown-christmas.html>

2) The first coming of Christ points to the second coming of Christ, which means the rapture comes first and is next

- Every year at Christmas I'm reminded of the similarities between the first coming of Jesus Christ and His return for His bride.
 - It's this much-needed reminder of Jesus Christ coming back for us that brings us hope, assurance, encouragement and peace.
 - When you know that you have this to look forward to, it makes whatever you're going through, so much easier to get through.
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- The fact of the matter is, Jesus is coming soon, however, while there are similarities there are also some major differences too.
 - When He comes, He won't be a baby born in a manger and He won't be the Savior dying on a cross, He will be King of kings.
 - The first time Jesus came, He was born at night, but when He comes at the rapture He takes His bride as a thief in the night.
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- The first time He was born to die, however, this time when He comes He takes those who are born again, and they'll never die.
 - It's for this reason that during this season, we celebrate the Savior's birth, and in so doing, we also celebrate the Savior's death.
 - Were it not for His death and resurrection, His work here, to bring peace and good will toward men would've been incomplete.
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- The first time He came it was through a virgin's womb, and in death He left through an empty tomb so we could be born again.
 - As one aptly quipped, Jesus entered our world through a door marked No Entrance, and left it through a door marked No Exit.
 - The question for all mankind becomes will we allow Him entrance into the door of our life for eternal life, when we exit this life?
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- Christmas is about the Savior born to die, so that we can be born again to live. His birth points to His death for our eternal life.
 - The way He entered this world would be similar to how He left this world in that His death is woven into the fabric of his birth.
 - His body was wrapped in cloth in a stone manger at His birth, and His body was wrapped in cloth in a stone tomb at His death!
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- Just as His entering the world was similar to His leaving the world, so too will it be similar to when He takes us out of this world.
 - If you were to ask me what I thought the world would be like right before the rapture of the church my answer would be like this.
 - In other words, what the world was like when Jesus came the first time is looking eerily similar to what the world is like today.
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- The first similarity is that Jesus was born at night in darkness literally and spiritually, as the light and the Savior of the world.
 - I think you would agree that the world we are living in today in 2015 and about to step into in 2016, is getting darker by the hour.
 - Just as the light of God's glory shined bright on shepherds that dark night, so too will it shine on His bride as a thief in the night.
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- The second similarity is that Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary who were all alone and were very far away from their home.
 - Luke's gospel indicates that Mary alone wraps him in cloth and places him in the manger, and she does this after giving birth.
 - As for those of you who wonder where the wise men were, we're told they didn't come until later when Jesus was as a child.

Matthew 2:1, 10-11 NKJV Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ... (10) When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. (11) And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

- I don't point this out because I wish to ruin the nativity scene you put up for Christmas; rather, it's to reveal another similarity.
- Namely, we, as the bride of Christ are like Mary the bride of Joseph we're not only all alone we too are also very far from home.
- Every year at Christmas, I'm reminded of how much we as Christian's have overstayed our welcome in a world not our home.

- It's this third similarity that I'll close with and it has to do with where the Savior's birth takes place and to whom it's announced.
- Here's why, unto us a Savior is born as a babe but in the little town of Bethlehem, which by any standard is small, and obscure.
- If that weren't bad enough, His birth announcement first goes out to filthy lowly shepherds, which by any standard are nobody's.

- Why is His birth at night in a feeding trough to a couple alone in a small town, then, first announced to filthy lowly shepherds?
- You'd think the Savior of the world would be born in the day in a clean place, a better town then announced to society's elite.
- Answer-in the day you don't need the light and a clean place doesn't need to be cleaned and it would be beneath society's elite.

- If the Savior had been born in pomp and plenty, it wouldn't have been good tidings of great joy, which would be to "all" people.
- If the announcement had gone to society's elite and not to lowly shepherds then good tidings of great joy is for "those" people.
- If this will bring great joy to shepherds, then it will bring great joy to "all" people," from "all" walks of life, especially the nobody's.

- This is why God became a man, "Immanuel," God with us, Who sends to us His only begotten Son, because of His love for us!
- Jesus was born in this way for us today as if to say; "I love you! I want to save you, so you won't perish but have eternal life!"
- How? By confessing with your mouth, Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that your greatest need was His greatest deed.

Romans 10:9-10 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. NIV

Romans 10:13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." NIV